

HIS MAJESTY MEETS REPRESENTATIVES OF PRIVATE SECTOR AND SMES

Public-private sector partnership vital



- APPROACH TO MAINTAIN THE
PACE OF DEVELOPMENT
- CONSOLIDATE PARTNERSHIP
BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE
SECTORS FOR GROWTH
- ENHANCE THE ROLE OF
PRIVATE SECTOR IN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
- EFFORTS ARE MADE TO
ESTABLISH A POWERFUL
PRIVATE SECTOR
- MAKE BUSINESS
ENVIRONMENT MORE
COMPETITIVE AND
ATTRACTIVE
- INDUSTRY SHOULD BE
CAPABLE OF GENERATING
MORE JOB OPPORTUNITIES
- SIGNIFICANCE OF
EMPOWERING OMANI SMES
AND START-UPS

Overwhelming Response on Al Mouj Muscat's
New Business Park Following Launch

Al Mouj Muscat has announced that it has sold 3 buildings out of 5 of the first phase of its newly launched Business Park, which is set within Al Mouj Muscat's 18-hole oceanfront golf course offers businesses an exemplary business location unsurpassed in the Middle East. Well-placed, well-connected and with a focus on wellbeing, we will look here at the unique features that sets it apart, its investment potential, what it offers companies choosing it as a base and the impact it will have on Oman.

Flexible office space fit for all

The cutting-edge complex comprises 39,000 square meters of flexible office space making it suited to enterprises of a wide variety of sizes. There are eight buildings ranging from 3,990 to 5,320 square meters and set across two districts, three in Business Park East and five in Business Park West.

Modern and state-of-the-art, the offices will be built to exacting Grade A standards offering occupiers a premium working environment and a generous underground parking allocation of between 115 and 148 spaces per office block, one of the most generous in Muscat.

Designed to blend in

Al Mouj Muscat is committed to preserving the natural environment and this extends to Al Mouj Golf, now a multi award-winning model for environmental sustainability, and reflected in the design of the park.

A mix of low and mid-rise buildings topped by roof gardens, seamlessly linked by trees and beautifully landscaped spaces will help them blend into their lush surroundings in



line with the premier lifestyle destination's exemplary eco-conscious standards.

Space to Innovate and Reimagine Business

Inside and out, Al Mouj Business Park has been designed so people can meet, share ideas and be inspired to create new solutions. High quality interiors are matched by outstanding panoramic views across the course, out to sea and towards the majestic Hajar Mountains. Such a unique and beautiful outlook will connect people to nature and promote a feeling of space and tranquillity, which supports wellbeing and morale.

The design of the interior and exterior is the ideal setting for a positive business environment, nurturing creativity, innovation and boosting productivity.

A sophisticated eco-system of support

Companies can take advantage of Al Mouj

Muscat's established meetings and events eco-system. Corporate support services can be found at neighbouring Al Mouj Golf and several 4 and 5-Star hotels including the Okura Hotel, the St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, the Kempinski, the Mysk and the Rotana.

Mixing business with pleasure

In addition to its commercial amenities, Al Mouj presents a playground of world-class leisure, entertainment and tourism options on the doorstep, perfect for client and customer hospitality and providing employees with opportunities for a healthy work life balance.

Well-connected

The business park is in an excellent location with extensive transport links connecting businesses readily to the region and to the rest of the world. There is immediate access onto Al Mouj Muscat's 18 November Street and the park is only 10 minutes from



Muscat City Centre, 10 minutes to Muscat International Airport and 15 minutes to the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre.

Investor confidence

Through a combination of unique setting and unparalleled connections, Al Mouj Business Park will provide exceptional opportunities for people and businesses, including investors looking for excellent returns and long-term gains. Al Mouj Muscat understands how to create a sense of space and place and is confident that its exemplary new park will appeal to companies of all sizes from across the region.

Impact on Oman

There is strong demand for Grade A office space in Oman and the Al Mouj Business Park has the capacity to accommodate up to 2000 employees across the eight buildings. Its presence will also generate additional jobs and business opportunities

in support services and hospitality, which continues to build on the long-term positive impact Al Mouj Muscat has had on the country's economy over the last 17 years. A joint venture between the Oman government and Majid Al Futtaim Properties, Al Mouj Muscat drives growth across tourism, employment and development and actively contributes to economic diversification. Since 2006, it has created over 2,200 jobs, supports 150 small and medium size enterprises, and has secured more than \$884 million in foreign direct investment.

Dynamic and diverse, the Al Mouj community is now home to 8,000 residents and attracts 4.9 million annual visitors to its coastal setting, boulevard style retail and dining experiences, luxury hotels, 400-berth marina and multi award-winning golf course.

To find out more about Al Mouj Business Park visit www.almouj.com



HM meets business people, SME owners



HIS MAJESTY
THE SULTAN
COMMENDED
THE ROLE OF THE
PRIVATE SECTOR
AND BUSINESS
OWNERS IN MEETING
THE FUTURE
ASPIRATIONS OF THE
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GIVING JOBS FOR
CITIZENS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik held a meeting at Al Alam Palace on Wednesday with businesspersons and owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to Allah the Almighty for the bounties with which He has bestowed on Oman. He expressed gratitude for the accomplishments and positive results about which, he said, “We feel satisfied and which inspire us to move towards the future with more confidence”.

His Majesty prayed to the Almighty to endow Oman and its people with abundant riches and empower them to achieve further development and prosperity.

His Majesty the Sultan touched on the future approaches of the State and its policies aimed at maintaining the pace of the comprehensive development process as planned in Oman

Vision 2040.

Through this meeting, His Majesty the Sultan underscored his great attention, his continuous follow-up of private sector affairs and his keenness to consolidate partnership and communication between the public and private sectors during the upcoming stage.

ROLE OF PRIVATE SECTOR

His Majesty underlined the importance of enhancing the role of the private sector and enabling it to play its envisaged roles by integrating with all components of the Omani economic system and boosting the country’s economic development.

His Majesty the Sultan commended the role of the private sector and business owners in meeting the future aspirations of the Omani economy, notably by supporting efforts made to establish a powerful private sector that leads a competitive economy that is capable of integrating with

the global economy.

This, His Majesty noted, is realised by according attention to knowledge-based economy informed by applied research and utilising the best technologies and innovations, namely technologies those related to the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

His Majesty stressed the need to prepare the business environment to be more competitive and attractive for investments and capable of generating more employment opportunities - an environment in which the government exercises a regulatory role aimed at achieving efficiency and successful management.

In this context, His Majesty hailed the role of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

As part of his Royal attention to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups, His

Majesty the Sultan affirmed the significance of empowering Omani SMEs and start-ups within the Omani economy system. He laid emphasis on the integration of these businesses with large companies through the innovative solutions and by offering quality business opportunities in the local and foreign markets. His Majesty expressed his appreciation for the role played by the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development.

His Majesty the Sultan also lauded the role of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), which, he said, is considered the prime mover of the private sector. He touched on the new OCCI system, which was implemented after engaging a large segment of business owners and listening to their views.

He underlined the importance of enabling the OCCI to play its role as a representative of the private sector and achieving

its objectives in a manner that enhances its growth and augments its contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP), notably in the sectors of economic diversification.

Within the context of His Majesty’s interest in everything that would contribute to strengthening the national economy, special importance was accorded to SME business owners’ benefiting from the infrastructure, facilities, stimulating economic packages, and many other programmes espoused by the government, including the promotion of local content of Omani industries and other incentives and programmes.

At the conclusion of the end of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan underscored the significance of forging an effective partnership between the government and private sectors, so that the private sector can play its desired role in implementing

projects and investments that contribute to economic diversification, the growth of GDP and the creation of employment opportunities for citizens.

His Majesty the Sultan wished all success in their endeavours to realise the good of this dear country.

The meeting was attended by HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Chairman of the Supervisory Committee for the Start-ups Programme; Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance and Chairman of the Financial and Economic Committee at the Council of Ministers; Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office; Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour; and Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development. — ONA



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BIG BOOST FOR SMALL COMPANIES



FOCUS ON KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY BY UTILISING TECHNOLOGIES ESPECIALLY THOSE RELATED TO THE 4TH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION



PREPARE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT TO BE MORE COMPETITIVE AND CAPABLE OF GENERATING MORE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES



GOVERNMENT TO EXERCISE REGULATORY ROLE AIMED AT ACHIEVING EFFICIENCY AND SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT



EMPOWERING OMANI SMEs AND START-UPS AND INTEGRATE THESE BUSINESSES WITH LARGE COMPANIES THROUGH THE INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS



OCCI'S ROLE IS IMPORTANT AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES OF ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION



SPECIAL IMPORTANCE WAS ACCORDED TO SMEs WITH INFRASTRUCTURE, FACILITIES, ECONOMIC PACKAGES, AND THE PROMOTION OF LOCAL CONTENT





معرض مسقط
الدولي للكتاب - ٢٠٢٣
Muscat International
BOOK FAIR - 2023
محافظة جنوب الباطنة (ضيف الشرف)
٢٢ فبراير - ٤ مارس 22nd February - 4th March



A CELEBRATION OF LITERATURE, CULTURE AND KNOWLEDGE



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

The Muscat International Book Fair (MIBF) has become an integral part of Oman's cultural calendar, attracting thousands of visitors every year. With its vibrant atmosphere, a diverse range of books and an exciting programme of events, the fair is a must-visit destination for anyone with a passion for literature and culture.

The fair features over 500 exhibitors, including international publishers and distributors, showcasing a diverse range of books in various genres, including literature, history, science, politics and religion. Attendees can explore the latest titles from renowned authors, discover new talents and engage in discussions with experts on topics that interest them. The fair also includes interactive events such as book signings and literary workshops.

The fair includes a dedicated space for technology-related events, including a technology-driven storytelling session for children and virtual reality experiences for attendees.

In addition to the exhibition of books, the MIBF hosts various cultural and educational events. The fair includes seminars, talks and panel discussions on various topics, including literature, culture and history. These events bring together experts from different fields to share their knowledge and engage in thought-provoking discussions.

The 27th Muscat International Book Fair is not just an exhibition of books, but it also includes a diverse range of cultural and educational events.

Here are some of the events that visitors can look forward to: Seminars and Talks: The fair features a programme of seminars and talks by experts on various topics, including literature, culture and history. Attendees can engage in thought-provoking discussions on a range of issues.

Workshops: There are various workshops available for attendees who want to improve their literary skills. These workshops cover a range of topics, including creative writing, poetry and storytelling.

Book Signings, Meet and Greets: Visitors can meet and interact with their favourite authors and get their books signed. This is a great opportunity for book lovers to meet the writers who have inspired them.

Children's Activities: There are many fun and engaging activities for children, including storytelling sessions, puppet shows and technology-driven storytelling. These activities are designed to promote a love of reading and learning in children.

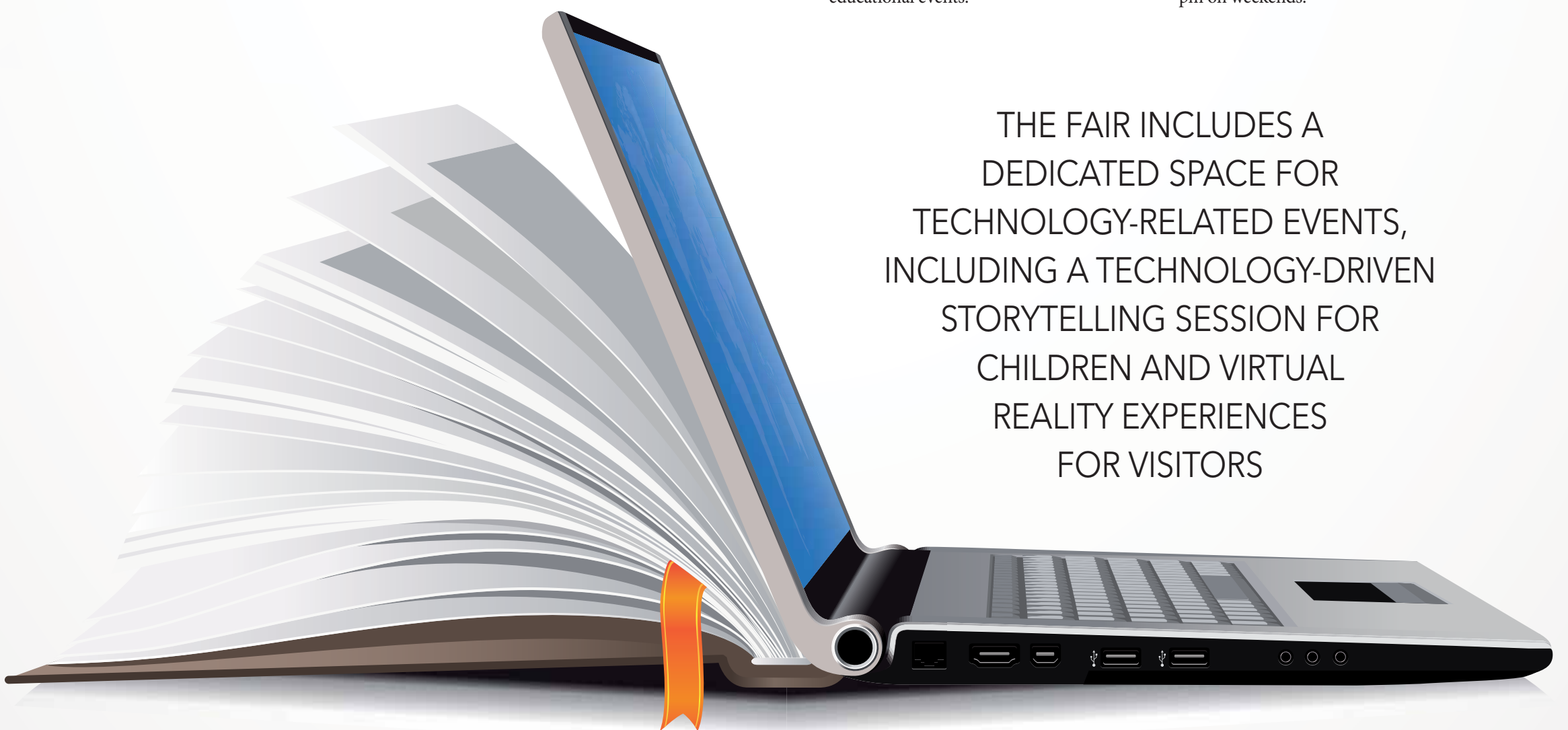
Cultural Performances: The fair also includes cultural performances by local and international artists. Visitors can enjoy traditional music, dance and theatre performances, providing a glimpse into different cultures.

Virtual Reality Experiences: The fair includes virtual reality experiences that allow visitors to immerse themselves in different worlds and stories. These experiences are a unique way to engage with literature and technology.

These events are just a sample of what the 27th Muscat International Book Fair has to offer. With such a diverse range of activities, there is something for everyone at the fair. It is an excellent opportunity to explore different cultures, meet new people and discover new ideas.

The 27th Muscat International Book Fair is an opportunity for people of all ages to discover new books, explore different cultures and engage with a diverse community of book lovers. The fair runs until March 4, 2023, and is open from 10 am to 10 pm on weekdays and 2 pm to 10 pm on weekends.

THE FAIR INCLUDES A
DEDICATED SPACE FOR
TECHNOLOGY-RELATED EVENTS,
INCLUDING A TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN
STORYTELLING SESSION FOR
CHILDREN AND VIRTUAL
REALITY EXPERIENCES
FOR VISITORS





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Meter app for all Orange and White taxis soon

25 INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES ANNOUNCED FOR 2023



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The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is planning to roll out Aber taxi-meter mobile app soon for all Orange and White taxis to calculate fares and distance.

All formalities have been completed and the service will be launched in the coming months. These meter fares will not be applicable to the company-operated services, officials said while announcing the future plans of the ministry in Muscat on Wednesday.

The ministry said marine logistics, digital and economy, and development of dry ports will be its priority areas in the future.

Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaidhani, Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology, meanwhile, said the ministry is working with automobile dealers to ensure that nearly 79 per cent of the cars on the roads will be electrically driven by 2035.

Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said, "As a priority, we will continue to focus on providing services to the country and unlock some of the key economic sectors with the right policies - marine sector, trucking/road transport. We will continue to tap investment opportunities in the ports sector and the digital economy with the

1. Meter fares will not be applicable to the company-operated services
2. Water taxis planned in Musandam, Al Batinah and Muscat
3. 79 per cent of the cars on the roads will be electrically driven by 2035
4. Railway project to link Oman to Saudi Arabia
5. Incomplete stretch of the Adam-Thamrait road will be retendered

help of the private sector."

On the UAE-Oman railway project, which will link the GCC countries, he said, "We expect by the end of this year or early next to award the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) for this project. As such,

the actual work on the ground will take a year or so from the awarding of the EPC."

He said the government is working on the railway project that will link Oman to Saudi Arabia.

Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Under-Secretary for Transportation, said, "Our focus will be to finish incomplete projects and launch some new projects like the Raysut-Mughsail dual road, Nizwa-Izki, and Ibri-Saudi border road dualisation. Incomplete stretch of the Adam-Thamrait road will be retendered. Some existing roads. will be upgraded."

WATER TAXIS

Laws have been finalised and locations identified to launch water taxis in Musandam, Al Batinah and Muscat. The project will be launched in Musandam Governorate.

The ministry said that tunnel-based road projects are not viable as the cost of operating the tunnels on the Al Sharqiyah Expressway ranges between RO 30,000 and RO 40,000 per month.

The ministry unveiled 25 investment opportunities in Maabela-Thamid road, Thamrait-Salah truck road, commercial activities in Port Sultan Qaboos, ports in Sadah, Dhalkout, Shinas, Sur, land transport tracking system, and the installation of smart scales on the main roads.

The Rusayl-Bidbid project is expected to be completed in the first quarter of the next year.

State Council approves draft law on water resources

KHALID AL ADAWI
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

The State Council on Wednesday approved the draft water and sanitary drainage sector regulatory law referred to it from the Council of Ministers, in preparation for referring it to His Majesty.

The State Council also approved a study conducted by the Economic Committee on the governance of water resources in the Sultanate of Oman.

At the opening of the sixth session of the fourth annual sitting, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, stressed that the ongoing seventh term witnessed many legislative achievements as well as valuable studies and proposals in various fields.

The chairman of the State Council touched on the agenda of the session, which saw elaborate deliberations and several proposals by the council members.

The chairman commended the many achievements made during the current term which, he said, was a valuable addition to what has been accomplished in previous terms.

The Economic Committee



reviewed the general framework of the draft water and sanitary drainage sector regulatory law. Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Harthy, head of the committee, said: "Within the framework of the restructuring of the various state institutions and sectors that the Sultanate of Oman witnessed during the second half of the year 2020, the restructuring of the water and sanitary drainage sector pursuant to Royal Decree No 131/2020 regarding the water and sanitary drainage sector. As a complementation of this decree, the draft water and sanitary drainage sector regulatory law was referred to the State Council from Majlis Ash'shura on January 18, this year and was then referred to the Economic Committee to

express its observations on the draft law.

The meeting witnessed a discussion on the study submitted by the Economic Committee on the governance of water resources in the Sultanate of Oman. Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Harthy, head of the economic committee, said the study comes within the framework of the optimal utilisation of financial resources in the Sultanate of Oman. A series of regulatory, legislative and administrative measures were taken which include the restructuring of the water sector and water demand management policies, and economic and legal controls were adopted to achieve this goal.

— Photo by Huda al Bahriya

Oman takes part in G20 anti-corruption meet in India

GURUGRAM, INDIA: Oman, represented by the State Audit Institution (SAI), is currently taking part in the 1st meeting of the Anti-Corruption Working Group of the G20 in the Republic of India, which will last till 4 March.

Oman's participation in the G20 meetings for this year comes to enrich the fields of knowledge through the exchange of expertise and experiences among the participating countries, in addition to highlighting Oman's efforts in the areas that will be addressed by the group.

The Anti-Corruption Working Group discusses many topics, including international cooperation in combating



corruption and economic crimes, recovering stolen assets and addressing the role of integrity in the specialised authorities concerned with preventing and combating corruption.

A number of working groups within the G20 are participating

in the meeting, covering various fields such as finance, energy transitions, trade and tourism, health, sustainable agriculture and food security, as well as education, combating terrorism and corruption.

— ONA

TRA to ban import of mobile devices without 4G support

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The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) said it would stop approving and importing communication devices that do not support a minimum 4G network.

TRA said VoLTE (Voice over 4G LTE) network must be enabled in all mobile devices starting from February 28, 2023. Devices not supporting VoLTE features will be banned from entering Omani markets from April 1, 2023.

TRA urged institutions and individuals to upgrade their devices that support modern technologies. On Sunday, TRA announced it would gradually stop providing third-generation (3G) mobile services from the third quarter of 2024.

TRA plans to stop the 3G services from July 2024 as part of the efforts to improve communications services, directing natural resources such as frequency band spectrum, investing in modern technologies, and focusing on offering better-quality services.

Earlier, speaking to the Observer, a top TRA official had said that there is a programme in place to close 3G networks so that service providers can use 3G spectrum capacities for new technologies such as 4G and 5G.

The suspension of 3G services will gradually start with the least populated areas.

The decision also reflects the rapid development of the telecommunications sector in the world, which necessitates investment in modern technologies. It results in shutting



down the least effective networks to allow the use of more effective networks, allowing subscribers

better quality services and enhancing the experience of using the latest and most advanced

networks.

In 2022 first half, 21 per cent out of 526,531 home fixed broadband

subscriptions were via 5G wireless, while 49 per cent of fixed broadband subscriptions were in the Muscat Governorate.

There has been a constant growth in the number of Fibre to Home subscriptions, with more homes and areas coming under coverage.

It was revealed that nearly 80 per cent of buildings would be covered by fixed high-speed broadband, noting that fibre services would cover over 600,000 buildings in 2022.

According to GSMA Intelligence, by 2025, there will be around 50 million 5G connections, with around 20 million in the GCC States. The report added that 5G would also add pressure to phase out previous generation networks in markets where 5G network rollout has been quick.



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In brief

■ HELSINKI



FINNISH PARLIAMENT PASSES NATO BILL

Finland's parliament on Wednesday overwhelmingly backed its bid to join Nato, the assembly's speaker said. Approval of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's treaties and Finland's accession passed with 184 members of the 200-seat parliament voting in favour, seven against and one abstaining.

In response to Russia's war on Ukraine a year ago, Finland last May applied to join Nato, having until now relied solely on its own armed forces to defend the 1,300-km border it shares with Russia. New Nato entrants must be approved by all existing members of the Western military alliance.

■ TASHKENT



BLINKEN SAYS NO PLAN TO MEET RUSSIAN FM

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that he has no plans to meet either the foreign ministers of Russia or of China during the Group of 20 (G20) meeting in New Delhi.

Blinken was on a brief tour of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and will head to the Indian capital for the G20 meeting, where Moscow's war on Ukraine will be an important part of discussions. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang are attending the meeting.

"No plans to see either (China or Russia's foreign ministers) at the G20, although I suspect that we will certainly be in group sessions."

■ BEIJING



CHINA TO WORK WITH BELARUS ON BILATERAL TIES

China President Xi Jinping said the country is willing to work with Belarus to promote the healthy and stable development of bilateral relations at the highest level, state media reported on Wednesday.

Xi also said China and Belarus should support each other in "safeguarding their own core interests, oppose interference by external forces in internal affairs, and safeguard the sovereignty and political security of the two countries."

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko was in Beijing attending several state meetings. The two heads of state signed a joint statement.

TRAINS WERE TRAVELLING ON THE SAME TRACK, SAYS REGIONAL GOVERNOR

36 KILLED, DOZENS INJURED AS TRAINS COLLIDE IN GREECE

LARISSA, Greece: A passenger train and a cargo train collided head-on in Greece on Tuesday night, killing at least 36 people and injuring dozens as the country's deadliest rail crash in living memory threw entire carriages off the tracks.

Many of the victims were thought to be university students on their way back from a long holiday weekend. The death toll was expected to rise further, officials said.

"There was panic... the fire was immediate, as we were turning over we were being burned, fire was right and left," said Stergios Minenis, a 28-year-old passenger who jumped to safety from the wreckage.

A passenger who escaped from the fifth carriage told Skai TV: "Windows were being smashed and people were screaming... One of the windows caved in from the impact of iron from the other train."

Cranes lifted derailed passenger carriages in the morning, as rescuers continued to scour through the smouldering mangled mass of steel.

One carriage stood on its side at almost 90 degrees from the rest of the wrecked train, with others tilting precariously.

The local station master, in charge of signalling, has been arrested, a police official said, as investigators tried to find out why

the two trains had been on the same track. "It's an unthinkable tragedy. Our thoughts today are with the relatives of the victims," Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said at the site of the crash, looking shattered.

"One thing I can guarantee; we will find out the causes of this tragedy and do anything in our power for it never to happen again."

The crash occurred as the passenger train that was headed to the northern Greece city of Thessaloniki from the capital Athens emerged from a tunnel near the town of Larissa.

Government spokesman Giannis Oikonomou said the two trains had been running towards each other on the same track "for many kilometres" before the crash.

The passenger train was carrying 342 travellers and 10 crew, while two crew were on the cargo train, according to Hellenic Train data. Sixty-six of those injured were hospitalised, six of whom in intensive care, a fire brigade official said.

Survivors were evacuated to Thessaloniki, where one woman ran to embrace her daughter as she disembarked from a bus with other survivors.

"Mum don't, I'm hurt," the daughter said. Another woman, who was waiting there, said her child was not picking up the



This aerial drone photograph shows emergency crews searching wreckage after a train accident in the Tempi Valley near Larissa, Greece, on Wednesday. — AFP

phone. The head of the emergency unit in Larissa hospital, Apostolos Komnos, said most of the dead were young people, in their 20s.

The government declared three days of national mourning, from Wednesday to Friday, with flags flying at half-mast in a tribute to the victims of the crash. President Katerina Sakellaropoulou cut short a visit to Moldova to return to Greece.

"Even at this moment, a life-saving operation is going on to help those who are on this death train," she told a news conference in the Moldovan capital Chisinau.

ERT state TV showed one crew carrying what was thought to be a victim, covered in a white sheet, to an ambulance.

Fire brigade spokesperson Vassilis Varthakogiannis said the evacuation of passengers took

place in "difficult conditions given the severity of the collision of the two trains."

"We are living through a tragedy. We are pulling out people alive, injured...there are dead," he said.

The cargo train had been travelling from Thessaloniki to Larissa. Local media said the train left Athens around 7.30 pm (05:30 GMT). — AFP

Erdogan indicates elections to be in May, 3 months

ANKARA: President Tayyip Erdogan indicated on Wednesday that elections will be held on May 14, sticking to his previous plan for the vote with a date just over three months after a devastating earthquake killed more than 45,000 people in Turkiye.

"This nation will do what is necessary on May 14, God willing," Erdogan said in a speech to lawmakers from his ruling AK Party in parliament, in an apparent reference to elections seen as representing his biggest ever political challenge.

here had been conflicting signals over the likely timing of the presidential and parliamentary elections since last month's earthquake, with some suggesting they could be postponed until later in the year or could be held as scheduled on June 18.

Before the disaster, Erdogan's popularity had been eroded in recent years by soaring inflation and a slump in the lira which hit living standards, although some opinion polls in recent months had shown signs of a pick-up in his support.

Erdogan has faced a wave of criticism over his government's handling of the deadliest quake in the nation's modern history.

But he defended Ankara's response on Wednesday, saying it had been caught up in "a storm of earthquakes".



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attends his party's group meeting at the Turkish Grand National Assembly in Ankara, Turkiye, on Wednesday. — AFP

"We will build better buildings in place of those which collapsed. We will win hearts and we will unroll a new future in front of our people," he said in a speech accompanied by a video showing all the state had done in response to the disaster.

Erdogan had previously said he was bringing the votes forward to May to avoid holidays in June.

Doubts have been expressed over election authorities' ability to make logistical arrangements for those affected in the quake zone, home to some 14 million people, to vote.

Election officials are visiting the region this week to prepare a report on its preparedness.

Erdogan rose to power 20 years ago as Turkiye grappled with a severe economic crisis in 2001 and chronic corruption that

crippled institutions.

The coalition of that time had faced accusations of mishandling a devastating 1999 earthquake.

Now he also must contend with criticism over the response to the quake in a region that traditionally backed him.

He took 55 per cent of the vote in the 10 quake hit-provinces in a 2018 presidential election and his party and its partners won the same level of support in a parliamentary election.

Some Turks in one of the areas worst hit by the quake voiced disappointment on Wednesday at the state response to the disaster, which they said had a negative impact on people's views of the government.

"Everyone here votes for the AKP instinctively. But help arrived here very late.

People are having second thoughts," said a market owner in the town of Narli, 20 km from the first quake's epicentre.

"I don't believe the opposition is up to the task either. But we need fundamental change," said 70-year-old farmer Mehmet from the village of Igdeli.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) said the death toll in Turkiye had risen to 45,089, bringing the total toll including Syria to about 51,000.

The quake also injured 108,000 people in Turkiye. — Reuters

Nigeria's Tinubu defends win in disputed presidential poll

ABUJA: Nigeria's new president-elect, Bola Tinubu, called on citizens to unite around him on Wednesday, as he defended the integrity of the national election he won amid a bitter dispute over the results. Both of the two main opposition parties have rejected the outcome as fraudulent, and said they would challenge the results in court.

The bitter dispute has raised fears of violence in Africa's most populous nation and leading energy producer, which has a long history of electoral violence.

In past polls, street gangs with loyalty to Tinubu in the commercial hub of Lagos have fought pitched battles with gangs loyal to rival parties.

"I am very happy I have been elected the president of the federal republic of Nigeria," Tinubu said to cheers in Abuja. "This is a serious mandate. I

hereby accept it." He now faces a litany of national problems, including insurgencies in the northeast, armed attacks, killings and kidnappings, conflict between livestock herders and farmers, cash, fuel and power shortages, and deeply entrenched corruption. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) said Tinubu garnered 37 per cent, or 8.79 million votes, in the weekend election, ahead of main opposition challenger Atiku Abubakar's 29 per cent, or 6.98 million votes.

Peter Obi, an outsider popular with younger and more educated urban voters, won 25 per cent, or 6.1 million votes.

A candidate can win by getting more votes than any of their rivals, provided they get 25 per cent of the vote in at least two-thirds of the 37 federal territories. — AFP



A woman dances in celebration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu's victory in an election in Lagos, Nigeria, on Wednesday. — Reuters

Ukraine war takes centrestage on the eve of G20 meeting

RUPAM JAIN AND NEHA ARORA

The year-long Russian war in Ukraine took centrestage on the eve of a G20 foreign ministers meeting on Wednesday with the European Union foreign policy chief saying the success of the gathering in New Delhi would be measured by what it could do about the conflict and its impact. Russia said it would use the meeting to tell the world who, according to Moscow, was responsible for the political and economic crises the world finds itself in. Germany responded saying it would counter Russian “propaganda” at the G20 meeting.

The foreign ministers meeting comes days after a meeting of finance chiefs of G20 countries in Bengaluru that was also overshadowed by Russia’s war in Ukraine.

Delegates at the Bengaluru meeting wrangled over condemning Russia for the war, failed to reach a consensus on a joint statement and settled instead for a summary document.

“This war has to be condemned,” Josep Borrell, the European Union’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, told reporters.

“I hope, I am sure that India’s diplomatic capacity will be used in order to make Russia understand that this war has to finish,” Borrell said.

An EU source separately said the EU delegation would not support a statement at the G20 meeting if it did not include condemnation of the war. The comments came hours after Russia said it considered the G20 a prestigious forum “where balanced consensus decisions should be made in the interests of all humankind”.

“We intend to firmly and openly talk about the reasons and instigators of the current serious problems in world politics and the global economy,” the Russian Embassy in New Delhi said in a statement late on Tuesday.

“The destructive policy of the US and its allies has already put the world on the brink of a disaster, provoked a

RUSSIA SAYS IT WOULD TELL THE WORLD WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CRISES

rollback in socio-economic development and seriously aggravated the situation of the poorest countries,” it said. The New Delhi meeting is being attended by 40 delegations, including those headed by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang.

Lavrov arrived late on Tuesday and held talks with his Indian counterpart Subrahmanyam Jaishankar on Wednesday. He is also scheduled to meet his Chinese, Bangladeshi and South African counterparts.

A German foreign ministry spokesperson said in Berlin that Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock “will not allow Russia to take the stage and will firmly oppose Russian propaganda if necessary, as she has done in the past”.

British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly said London would seek to work with New Delhi to make the meeting successful. Cleverly will meet Qin on the sidelines, but not Lavrov.

Blinken said he had no plans to meet either Lavrov or Qin. “No plans to see either at the G20, although I suspect that we will certainly be in group sessions of one kind or another together,” Blinken told reporters in Tashkent.

The main G20 meetings will be held on Thursday after a welcome dinner on Wednesday.

The G20 includes the wealthy G7 nations as well as Russia, China, India, Brazil, Australia and Saudi Arabia, among other nations.

Host India said the war in Ukraine would be an important point of discussion but “questions relating to food, energy and fertiliser security, the impact that the conflict has on these economic challenges that we face” would also receive “due focus”.

Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra, the country’s top diplomat, said he also expected a clear message on terrorism.

The role of crypto currencies would be a part of the message, he said.

—Reuters

SWOOPING ON ITS CATCH!



A bald eagle swoops in and catches a coot in its talons at Orlando Wetlands Park in Christmas, Florida. The 1,650-acre park is a man-made wetland designed to provide advanced treatment for reclaimed water from the City of Orlando and other local cities. — AFP

Gabon summit promotes worth of tropical rainforests

A two-day conference to highlight the key environmental role and value of the world’s rainforests got under way in Gabon on Wednesday, backed by several leaders of tropical countries.

“Forests potentially represent 20-30 per cent of the solution to climate change,” Gabon’s minister of waters and forests, British-born Lee White, said in opening remarks.

Long recognised as a haven of biodiversity, tropical forests are increasingly acknowledged also as a buffer against climate change. Vegetation absorbs carbon dioxide under the natural process of photosynthesis, making forests a shield against climate-altering carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions. But they are also at threat, especially from loggers.

Between 2015 and 2020, around 25 million acres of forests were destroyed annually, according to United Nations figures.

The so-called One Forest Summit is a brainchild of Gabonese President Ali Bongo Ondimba and France’s President Emmanuel Macron, who announced it at last year’s UN climate COP in Egypt.

The conference will give a push to

THE CONFERENCE WILL GIVE A PUSH TO ADVANCING SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE ECOLOGICAL VALUE OF RAINFOREST AND FOSTERING ‘SUSTAINABLE VALUE CHAINS’ IN FORESTRY



French veterinarian and primatologist Sabrina Krief delivers her speech during the One Forest Summit in Libreville on Wednesday. — AFP

advancing scientific knowledge about the ecological value of rainforest and fostering “sustainable value chains” in forestry.

Another priority will be how to both monetise and preserve tropical forests for their value in supporting biodiversity and storing carbon emissions.

The host nation, Gabon, became the first African nation to be recompensed through carbon credits for protecting its forests. Gabon “absorbs around 100 million tonnes of CO2 per year... three tonnes every second,” White told AFP on the sidelines of the meeting.

“We are well on the way to becoming a sustainable economy.”

A big focus at the conference will be on the forests of the

Congo Basin — a crucial carbon “sink” and haven to rare species that is second in size to Amazonia.

“Around a third of the species in tropical Africa are threatened with extinction,” said Bonaventure Sonke, a professor at the University of Yaounde in Cameroon. Preserving them requires further knowledge about them, he said.

“We don’t know enough about the forests of the Congo Basin because they haven’t been sufficiently researched,” he said.

In contrast, he said, far more was known about the Amazonian rainforest, “because the resources were committed” to doing so.

Macron will be joining the meeting’s summit section on Thursday after flying out from Paris on Wednesday for a four-nation Central African tour.

Other presidents expected to attend are Denis Sassou Nguesso of the Republic of Congo; Faustin Archange Touadera of the Central African Republic; Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno of Chad; and Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea. — AFP

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WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

‘Rahyah’ clinched the golden sword in the Institutions round, while ‘Nakooh’ snatched silver sword in the individual round at the OCRF final race competition, which concluded in Barka on Wednesday.

The races were staged at Royal Camel Corps Square in Barka in the Governorate of South Al Batinah, supervised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth with the support of Occidental Oman Company, Royal Camel Corps, Ministry of Information and Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

The concluding ceremony was held under chief guest HH Sayyid Fares bin Fatik al Said, who honoured the final day’s winners, contributors and supporters.

More than 1,600 camels took part in the final race from various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, competing in 65 rounds to win 28 cars and 15 icons including the gold and silver swords.

The concluding day’s activities included an exhibition Arda race, singing on camel, camel carts and traditional arts.

The race action included four rounds, two of them for ‘Thanaya’ category for 8 km, with 10,000 rials and dagger for the first place in each round, and cash prize for the top ten. Two rounds were for ‘Alhaw’ category for 8 km, with 10,000 rials and sword for the first place in each round, and cash prize for the top ten.

‘Thanaya’ category
RCC’s Saa’ib snatched the opening round for institutions, trained by Hamad bin Salim al Jedili, with timing of 13 minutes and 39 seconds, Al Bashayer Institutions’ ‘Thagah’ came in second, coached by Jassim bin Qubaili al Muharbi. ‘Reval’ finished third owned by RCC, supervised by Amer bin Rashid al Omari.

In the individual round, ‘Tashreef’, owned by Ali bin Salim al Wahibi, claimed the title after completing the race distance in 13 minutes and 45 seconds. Maktoum bin Saad al Mahri’s ‘Rethaa’ came second and Abdullah bin Humid al Omari’s ‘Fakhama’ finished third.

‘Alhaw’ category
‘Nakooh’ snatched the silver sword in the individual round, owned by Hamad bin Mohammed al Wahaibi, with timing of 13 minutes and 31 seconds. ‘Najoom’ came second, owned by Ali bin Abdullah al Habsi, ‘Al Kahrab’ won the third place, owned by Saleh bin Eid al Qanoubi.

‘Rahyah’ clinched the golden sword in the Institutions round, owned by RCC under the supervision of Hamad bin Salim al Jedili, and recorded 13 minutes and 14 seconds. Bashayer Institutions’ ‘Al Bashayer’ was the runner-up, supervised by Humaid bin Mohammed al Jahafi, while ‘Mansorah’ finished third owned by RCC and trained by Rashid bin Salim.

RAHYAH

CLAIMS GOLDEN SWORD,

NAKHWAH

TAKES SILVER



U20 team face Korea in Asian Cup opener

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT, MARCH 1

Oman U20 team is keen to register a strong start in the AFC U20 Asian Cup Uzbekistan 2023 championship as it will take on South Korea on Thursday in the opening match of Group C at JAR Stadium. The match will begin at 14:00 (Oman time).

In the same group, Tajikistan will face off Jordan on Thursday at Lokomotiv Stadium and the encounter will start at 16:00.

The national junior boys will eye for a positive step in today's assignment against the young Taegeuk Warriors. Despite the difficulty of the clash, Oman team is aware that Thursday's triumph will act as a confidence booster for the team in the upcoming matches. The underway Asian event in Uzbekistan acts as a qualifier for the Fifa U20 World Cup Indonesia 2023 later this year.

The Oman boys have geared up for the Asian challenge after a recently concluded 10-day camp in Tashkent city ahead of the tournament start.

During the camp, the team played a friendly match against Asian Cup hosts Uzbekistan which the Uzbeks won 2-0. Besides that, the Oman team underwent two abroad camps in Qatar. The team had suffered two straight defeats in Doha against Qatar (6-1 and 3-0).

Spanish coach David Gordo and assisting coaching staff worked hard during the last couple of days to improve all the defending and scoring woes. The latest training sessions in Tashkent addressed all the required technical and tactical requirements for the forthcoming games. The Spanish coach is looking to deliver the desired targets for the team from this crucial participation and establishing a specific playing style.

"The team went for a different



stage of technical preparations to compete in this significant tournament. We worked hard to shape the players and now we are looking to achieve the planned targets," coach David Gordo said during the pre-match press conference on Wednesday.

OMAN TARGET NEXT ROUND

Oman's focus is to progress from the group stage as their last two participations ended at the group level.

"The team will aim to deliver a top match against Korea Republic, who are ranked as a top Asian team with high quality of players and are favourites to win the title. The players are almost adapted to the weather conditions after the external camp which finished recently in Tashkent prior to the start of the tournament," Gordo added.

The experienced Spanish coach said the Asian Cup acted as a golden opportunity for the players to help them to grow properly to be top stars in the future. "Taking part in a centennial competition level will assist the young players to achieve this goal."

He said the Oman team will play in their own style. "We will face the rivals with our own style. I know Korea Republic is a great team but we believe in our own style. We worked hard to analyse all the teams in the group and tournaments. This analysis will support us to face them in the tournament," Gordo concluded.

On the other hand, the 12-time champions will look to set a new record-extending 13th continental title.

Korea Republic head coach Kim Eun-jung said: "As the powerhouses in Asia, our goal is to win this edition of the Asian tournament. Admittedly, the other teams are also progressing so it will be tough, but we believe we are well prepared for the challenge."

Bodybuilding Championships for disabled and youths

AHMED AL KAABI

MUSCAT, MARCH 1

The Oman Bodybuilding Committee (OBC) revealed the details of the 18th Oman Open Championship for Bodybuilding. The competitions will be held from March 9 to 11 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The announcement of the launch of the championship was made by the OBC on Wednesday, in the presence of Chairman Dr Salim bin Said al Bahri.

Dr Salim al Bahri affirmed the committee's keenness to support young people and contribute positively to enhancing their capabilities in bodybuilding.

Al Bahri said: "The championship is one of the tournaments open to all those wishing to participate from the Sultanate of Oman and abroad. It is one of the important tournaments that had a glorious role in Oman reaching the podiums in the last World Championship in Spain where the team was able to win five medals including gold, silver and bronze. Oman also won medals in the Asian Championship. This 18th edition of the tournament will be a good opportunity for young people to prove their abilities and win first places, which gives them the chance to be selected for the national team."

The championship is an opportunity for the first places to represent Oman national team in the upcoming competitions, as the committee participates in a number of upcoming tournaments, including the



Asian Championship, which Lebanon will host next August, as well as the World Championship, which Spain will host next November. Al Bahri pointed out that the heads of the Gulf federations are studying the establishment of a Gulf Bodybuilding Championship with the announcement expected during the coming period.

TWO NEW CATEGORIES

This year, the committee introduced two new categories; one for the people with disabilities and another for youths aged between 16 to 23 years. It said

athletes with disabilities are an integral part of this country and their participation is an opportunity for them to prove their capabilities.

Al Bahri explained that the introduction of this category is the first initiative in the region after its competitions were included in the world championships.

Regarding the participation fees of the players in the tournament, Al Bahri said, "The committee sought not to increase the fees, in order to facilitate the participation of a larger number of players, as the participation of the player

for one category set an amount of RO 30 and for the player participating in two categories, a fee of RO 50. A fee of RO 3 was approved for the audience to attend and RO 3 for the coach."

Al Bahri explained that the dye used in the championship is the international dye approved by the International Federation of Bodybuilders (IFB), which is the type (Protaque), and it is an easy dye in use and cost.

Tournament Schedule

On March 9, the scale and lengths will

be taken.

The first day of the competition on March 10 will be devoted to two categories. The first category is 'Men physique' for junior bodybuilding (16-23 years), Men physiques up to 168 cm, Men physiques up to 174 cm, Men physiques up to 178 cm, and the champion of champions. The second category is 'muscular physique' for Men physiques up to 175 cm and Men physiques over 175 cm.

The second day on March 11 will be devoted to three categories. The first category is the 'bodybuilding category' for under 65 kg, under 75 kg, under 85 kg, above 85 kg and 'champion of champions'. The second category is 'classic body building' for the length of the first up to 171 cm, the length of the second up to 175 cm and the length of the third up to 175 cm. The last categories will be for the wheelchairs for the people with disabilities with one open weight.

Tournament Referees

The OBC has selected the best referees, as the Referees Committee in the tournament is chaired by referee Jose Maria, Chairman of the Referees Committee of the International Federation, and the membership of international referees from Oman, UAE, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

The committee introduced this year the Referees Course, which will be held on the sidelines of the championship, and the Spaniard Jose Maria, Chairman of the Referees Committee of the Asian Federation, will lecture on it.

Bucks claim 15th straight win, Morant has triple-double vs Lakers



Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo (34) controls the ball against Brooklyn Nets forward Royce O'Neale (00) and Brooklyn Nets guard Cam Thomas (24) during the fourth quarter at Barclays Center. – USA Today Sports

NEW YORK: The NBA-leading Milwaukee Bucks extended their winning streak to 15 games after defeating the Brooklyn Nets 118-104 away from home on Tuesday.

Milwaukee are now one win away from tying the third-longest streak in franchise history, while their best-ever run of 20 games, led by the great Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in the 1970-71 season, is now also within reach.

They had to come from behind against the Nets, trailing 35-22 early in the second quarter, but they pulled things level halfway through the third and then hit the front for the entire fourth period.

The Bucks were led by MVP hopeful Giannis Antetokounmpo with a game-high 33 points on 15-of-27 shooting, adding 15 rebounds and four assists on his return, while Defensive Player of the Year candidate Brook Lopez chipped in 13 points (six-of-13 shooting).

Three-time All-Star wing Khris Middleton continued his road to recovery with 18 points (seven-of-13), six assists and two steals in 23 minutes off the bench, but he is still yet to exceed 25 minutes in a game since the new year began.

For the Nets, Mikal Bridges was terrific with 31 points (11-of-19), five assists and two steals, and Spencer Dinwiddie put together a strong stat-line of 26 points (nine-of-17), eight assists and six rebounds.

With the win, the Bucks improved to 44-17, remaining ahead of the Boston Celtics (44-18) for the best record in the league.

Brooklyn have lost seven of their past nine, but still sit sixth in the Eastern Conference at 34-27.

Desperate for a strong finish to sneak into the play-offs, the Los Angeles Lakers suffered a 121-109 defeat against the Memphis

Grizzlies in the first game since LeBron James' injury.

James is expected to miss at least two weeks, and Anthony Davis stepped up to try and fill the void, contributing a team-high 28 points (nine-of-19), a game-high 19 rebounds and a game-high five blocks.

But it was not enough to prevent Ja Morant from getting the result for Memphis, with the reigning Most Improved Player putting together a massive 39-point triple-double, shooting 15-of-29 from the field with 10 rebounds and 10 assists.

Memphis (37-23) are almost a lock for a top-four seed in the west, while the Lakers (29-33) sit 12th, one game out of the play-in tournament places and 2.5 wins out of the six seed.

It threatened to be the latest Damian Lillard masterclass early before the Golden State Warriors strangled the life out of the Portland Trail Blazers in the second half of a 123-105 home victory.

Lillard — who is leading the NBA in scoring over the past 15 games with a gaudy 39.5 per contest — had 15 in the first quarter to help the Blazers build a 41-27 lead at the first break.

Golden State steadied the ship, and then produced a 75-40 second half, holding Lillard to just 10 points in the next three quarters and nine-of-21 shooting overall.

Jordan Poole led the way offensively for the Warriors, scoring 29 points (10-of-24 shooting) with six rebounds and five assists, while Donte DiVincenzo put together another strong performance in the starting line-up with 21 points (eight-of-11).

The win, combined with the Dallas Mavericks' loss, meant the Warriors (32-30) ended the day sitting fifth in the West. — dpa

Malan ton gives England thrilling win over Bangladesh

DHAKA: Dawid Malan scored a hundred under pressure to guide England to a thrilling three-wicket win over Bangladesh in the first one-day international in Dhaka on Wednesday.

Malan hit an unbeaten 114 off 145 balls as England reached their target with eight balls to spare after the hosts had them reeling with Jos Buttler, Jason Roy and James Vince all out cheaply.

Earlier England bowled out Bangladesh for 209 with Moeen Ali, Mark Wood, Jofra Archer and Adil Rashid each claiming two wickets and Najmul Hossain scoring 58, his maiden ODI half-century.

The hosts made a decent start after electing to bat first, with skipper Tamim Iqbal making 23. But after Chris Woakes earned the first breakthrough with the wicket of Liton Das, England struck whenever a partnership was developing.

Tamim was bowled by Wood before spinners were called into action, as England got valuable South Asian practice ahead of their defence of the ODI World Cup crown in India later this year.

Moeen bowled Shakib Al Hasan for eight before Rashid picked up the wicket of Mushfiqur Rahim.

Najmul and Mahmudullah Riyad (31) forged a 53-run partnership for the fifth wicket before they fell in successive overs.

Debutant Will Jacks claimed the wicket of Afif Hossain three overs later to kill off Bangladesh's remaining chance of putting up a big total.

England made a poor start with the bat, with Taijul Islam picking up 3-54 and complemented brilliantly by other bowlers as Bangladesh made a match out of low scores.

With help from Shakib, Mehidy Miraz and Taskin Ahmed, the visitors were reduced to 103-5 halfway through the innings with Roy, Buttler and Vince all out for single-digit scores.

Jacks made a valiant 26 and then Moeen provided Malan with some support in a vital 38-run sixth wicket stand before Mehidy dismissed him for 14.

However Malan, who along with Moeen participated in the recent Bangladesh Premier League Twenty20 tournament, hung on to keep England in the hunt.

Tamim took a fine diving catch at mid-on to dismiss Woakes off Taijul for seven to give the game some tension with England still



England's Dawid Malan celebrates reaching his century. – Reuters

needing 49.

But Malan, who came to the crease in the second over after Shakib dismissed Roy for four, guided tail-ender Rashid (17 not out) to complete the win.

Player of the match Malan earlier brought his fourth hundred in ODIs with a boundary off Taskin. He struck eight fours and four sixes overall.

"(I) spent a fair bit of time in Bangladesh, especially at this ground. Told Jos it would have been tough to chase if they'd have got 30-40 more," Malan said afterwards.

"Satisfying to get over the line, handling pressure is part of the job."

"These are tough conditions. Malan's innings is an example

for us on how to play on these wickets," Buttler said.

"There's plenty of areas to work and improve. It's about small partnerships on wickets like these."

Tamim said his side "should have scored at least 30-35 more".

"Have to give it to Malan," he conceded. "We tried everything in our bowling option."

— AFP

Alcaraz, Norrie withdraw from Acapulco ATP 500



ACAPULCO, Mexico: Top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz withdrew from the ATP 500 tournament in Acapulco on Tuesday with a right hamstring strain as fifth-seeded Cameron Norrie pulled out citing fatigue, organisers said.

Both had been on the order of play for Tuesday, just three days after Britain's Norrie rallied to beat an ailing Alcaraz 5-6, 6-4, 7-5 in the Rio Open final.

That result had left world number two Alcaraz with fresh fitness concerns after he was repeatedly seen by the physio.

"I have a grade 1 strain in my

right hamstring that will keep me out for several days, according to the tests we did this morning," Alcaraz said in a tweet. "I'm really sad I can't compete here, but now it's time to think about recovering and being ready as soon as possible. I hope to see you all soon!"

The 19-year-old had returned to competition with a victory in Buenos Aires a week earlier, ending a four-month injury lay-off.

He needed heavy strapping on his right thigh midway through the second set of the final in Rio, when he collapsed from a 3-0 lead as Norrie stormed back. Norrie, who

had fallen to Alcaraz in the Buenos Aires final, claimed the biggest clay-court title of his career in Rio.

The left-hander leads the ATP Tour in match wins this season with 18, compared to three defeats.

"Unfortunately I have to withdraw from Acapulco," Norrie said on Instagram. "It's one of my favourite tournaments, so it's really tough for me to withdraw."

Each player will be replaced in the draw by a lucky loser as they turn their attention to getting fit for the prestigious ATP 1000 event at Indian Wells, which starts on March 8. — AFP



Oman attracts over RO 300m in tech investments in 2022

New initiatives: New cybersecurity industry programme to create 'specialised cybersecurity industry'

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) announced that it attracted technology-related investments worth more than RO 300 million during 2022.

Dr Ali al Shidhani, Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology at the Ministry, shared the following during a press conference, "The digital economy will account for about a quarter of the global economy in 2025, so the Ministry is working with its partners in the public and private sector to implement the National Digital Economy Programme."

"One of the most important achievements in 2022 is the work to attract quality technical investments to the Sultanate of Oman. The ministry has attracted more than 300 million riyals in technology investments over the past year."

One of the investments is Green Data City, a data hosting centre and Oman's first crypto-mining centre worth RO 150 million in investments.

The centre is located in



One of the most important achievements in 2022 is the work to attract quality technical investments to the Sultanate of Oman.

DR ALI AL SHIDHANI

Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology

the Dhofar Governorate, and according to Dr Al Shidhani, has the "potential to serve as a model for other green data centres to come up".

Additionally, the Ministry unveiled an investment by semiconductor manufacturing company, Global Semiconductor Microelectronics, to train 100 Omani youths for jobs in the semiconductor industry.

In 2021 the digital economy contributed to 2 per cent of Oman's GDP. However, the Ministry aims to raise the sector's contribution to 3 per cent by 2025, 5 per cent in 2035 and 10 per cent in 2040.

The National Digital Economy Programme, approved by the Council of Ministers in 2021, encapsulates various strategies towards achieving Oman Vision

2040. In 2022, the Ministry unveiled three main executive programmes: the digital industry programme, the artificial intelligence programme and the national space programme.

Yesterday, the Ministry announced the launch of its newest executive programme, the cybersecurity industry programme, with the aim of creating a "specialised cybersecurity industry that will strengthen and diversify the local economy". The executive programme will focus on six main pillars: developing cyber security skills, supporting and developing SMEs, promoting innovation, stimulating the market and attracting investors, exporting services and experts, and awareness and promotion.

TRA unveils new 12-digit number series for IoT services



QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

To enable the widespread uptake of Internet of Things (IoT) related services in the Sultanate of Oman, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has launched a new number level (4) dedicated to IoT services, consisting of twelve digits, to meet the needs of IoT service providers.

In a statement, the Authority set the move aims to support the deployment of emerging technologies and enable the adoption of IoT. The initiative will also enable the efficient management of the National Plan for Telecom Numbers, promote the digital economy and investment opportunities, and develop the level of services in the country.

"The Authority seeks to enable Internet of Things services on a large scale in the Sultanate of Oman, due to its steady increase. To this end, it recently issued a directive to licensees on international roaming Internet of Things services, to enhance the

security level of these services, and to protect the personal data of beneficiaries," it stated.

The advisory follows a review of regulatory challenges and feedback from stakeholders in the telecommunications sector, it said.

The Authority attaches great importance to enhancing the security level of these promising future services, as it has also prepared "technical controls for the security of Internet services" of Things, to apply the best practices taken regionally and internationally in this field.

These controls include six mandatory security areas and thirteen optional security areas, such as encryption, data storage and protection, governance, privacy, system security, vulnerability management, and update management.

As many as four IoT service providers have been licensed to provide IoT services as of end-2022.

The number of subscriptions (machine to machine) in these services reached more than 364,000.

Shell Oman wins Oman Air jet fuel supply contract

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

Leading fuel marketing company Shell Oman Marketing Company has won a contract to supply 33 per cent of national carrier Oman Air's jet fuel requirements at Muscat International Airport, for a period of two years, starting from March 1, 2023.

In a filing, Shell Oman said it had received a Letter of Acceptance (LOA) on February 27, 2023, of its proposal from Oman Air.

"We would like to take this opportunity to thank Oman Air for the confidence vested in Shell Oman through this partnership. We certainly look forward to continuing working together to progress and develop Oman's aviation industry and its people," the fuel marketing company stated.

Currently, there are three local fuel service providers operating at Oman Airports: Shell Oman Marketing Co, Oman Oil Marketing Co, and Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co.

Oman plans major Agri-Industrial Food City in Najd

FOOD SECURITY: Project to serve as hub for agricultural cultivation and food processing all-year round

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

A first-of-its-kind agri-industrial city centred around large-scale crop cultivation and food processing is planned for development in the Najd area of Dhofar Governorate in the Sultanate of Oman.

The initiative is being spearheaded by Oman Food Investment Holding Company (Nitaj), the food sector investment arm of the Omani government, represented by Oman Investment Authority (OIA). Also supporting the landmark project is the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

"This initiative aims to establish an integrated agricultural-industrial food city through which the country can reduce the percentage of the food gap for strategic crops, in addition to creating an agricultural area in Najd containing all the facilities (farming, industrial and logistical) to provide the country with various fresh and manufactured



crops, as well as serve a model in the future to implement in other cities in different (governorates)," said Nitaj in an explanatory note.

As a first step in the implementation of this ambitious venture, Nitaj has invited consultancy firms to submit their qualifications in response to a competitive tender for a contract to undertake a feasibility study into the Agri-Industrial Food City project.

The successful bidder will be required to provide advisory services encompassing the

technical (master-planning as well), legal, commercial (marketing) and financial aspects of the project.

According to Nitaj, Najd's advantageous geographical location and climate characteristics makes its "one of the most promising agricultural areas" in the Sultanate of Oman.

Proposed to be located in Al Mazyouna, the project will also unlock a wide array of socioeconomic benefits for the country, among other beneficial knock-on effects, it points out.

"The initiative is expected to have several effects, most notably: providing job opportunities for Omanis, creating added value for the crop that will be produced in the City, provide contract areas for cultivate and manufacture of different food products for small and medium enterprises..." it said.

In essence, the project will serve as a hub for agricultural cultivation and processing as a year-round economic activity, Nitaj stressed.

In addition to large-scale

crop cultivation, Nitaj envisions the potential for investments in food processing and added value factories, such as ketchup and fruit drying plants etc), local manufacturing of agricultural and farming implements and tools, and activities focusing on agricultural inputs, such as seeds, irrigation items, and so on.

Crops targeted for cultivation in the new cluster will include those that can address the current food gap and are suitable for Najd's environment.

The area has been described as ideal for the cultivation of (i) Fruit crops (citrus, mango, banana); (ii) Vegetable crops (potatoes, onions, garlic, tomatoes, zucchini, okra, eggplant...) and (iii) Field crops ((wheat, sunflower, corn, canola...)) "It is expected that this city will attract various types of advanced and newly innovative technologies in the fields of agriculture and related industries," the state-owned entity further noted.

Importantly, as an integrated city, the new agro-centric industrial hub will also pull in investments to support the provision of educational, healthcare, shopping, retail and other commercial services, says Nitaj.

The deadline for submission of qualifications is April 26, 2023.

Businesses in Oman prepare for global, regional and local tax developments

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

Leading multinational professional services firm EY held the ‘Reshaping the Future of Tax 2023 – Oman’ seminar this week to address key tax topics relevant to businesses operating in the country.

The event provided the latest updates on the local, regional, and global tax environment, tax policies, recent tax trends across the MENA region with a focus on the GCC, as well as sustainability.

Ahmed al Esry, EY MENA Tax Leader, said: “The tax landscape in the MENA region is constantly evolving as tax increasingly becomes an important source of revenue for governments as they seek to diversify their sources of income and as an important policy tool to drive changes in the economy.

This makes it critical for all businesses in Oman to be up to date with their operating models and regularly review how the function is complementing their finance procedures – including the use of technology to streamline processes – to ensure they are thoroughly prepared ahead of any government announcements and can maintain compliance.”

At the seminar, EY global and regional tax leaders discussed how the future of tax is being reshaped and the growing significance of tax in Oman.

The recently announced 2023



THIS MAKES IT CRITICAL FOR ALL BUSINESSES IN OMAN TO BE UP TO DATE WITH THEIR OPERATING MODELS AND REGULARLY REVIEW HOW THE FUNCTION IS COMPLEMENTING THEIR FINANCE PROCEDURES - INCLUDING THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO STREAMLINE PROCESSES - TO ENSURE THEY ARE THOROUGHLY PREPARED AHEAD OF ANY GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCEMENTS AND CAN MAINTAIN COMPLIANCE.

National Oman Fiscal Budget mentioned 11 per cent of the GDP being accounted as the tax revenue, highlighting the importance of multiple income streams to support the country’s transition to a non-hydrocarbon driven economy.

In addition to key Oman tax

practices, attendees went over general recent tax trends across MENA, tax policy evolution, VAT developments, the introduction of the UAE Corporate Tax, transfer pricing developments and the progress of BEPS Pillar 2.

The tax seminar saw the participation of over 150 CFOs, tax directors, tax and finance managers, lawyers, and business owners.

Alkesh Joshi, Oman Tax Leader and EY MENA Energy & Sustainability Tax Leader, added: “Businesses in Oman are aware that they need to stay up to date on tax directives but may not realise how quickly the changes will come and the impact they will see on their transactions.

In addition, with any new tax regulations comes challenges around the interpretation of various provisions and data transparency.

It is critical that organisations have a separate tax team and an ERP system ready to address issues or discrepancies on every transaction.

By ensuring that the tax function is agile and compliant, businesses will be able to more efficiently incorporate any amendments to the Corporate Income Tax Law and expansion of the Double Tax Treaty network between GCC countries.”

Businesses can also expect to see an emphasis on the use of technology by the Oman Tax Authority (OTA).

The digitalisation of tax compliance and controversy will focus on the e-filing of returns on the OTA portal, requests for more information from taxpayers made digitally, paperless assessments by the tax authority, increases data analytics, and shorter assessment timelines.

The Oman tax landscape has seen several amendments to VAT laws over the past 12 months. On October 15, 2022, the VAT Executive Regulations were amended, with 10 amendments to existing articles, and the inclusion of 2 additional clauses to existing articles.

The amendments also involved the VAT exemption of financial services, meaning businesses other than financial institutions are now eligible to exempt their sale of financial services. Furthermore, the OTA has recently requested that all large taxpayers and non-resident taxpayers submit the taxpayer checklist along with the quarterly VAT return.

Horwath HTL inaugurates Crowe forum on hotel tourism, leisure



MUSCAT: The Oman forum on hotel travel and leisure conducted by Crowe Oman, under the Horwath HTL umbrella, was inaugurated at the Crowne Plaza hotel Qurum yesterday under the patronage of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

Horwath HTL a member firm of Crowe Global is a global leader, offering unparalleled experience and expertise exclusively across Hotels, Tourism and Leisure spectrum. The meeting was presided over by Faisal al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industries.

Welcoming the guests, Davis Kallukaran, Managing Partner Crowe Oman said that the contribution of tourism Oman’s GDP is only 2.4% while the world average is around 10%. Oman is so unique and blessed with a diversified topography from Salalah to Muscat and every nook and corner of the Sultanate of Oman is rich in heritage and culture. “We should know our strengths and our available resources and leverage the strength by technology,” he added.

The tourism sector is expected to contribute 5% to the GDP by 2030 and 10% by 2040. With Oman Vision 2040, the government is expected to invest RO 10 billion in the tourism industry by 2040 to make the contribution of RO 9 billion from tourism alone to the GDP. The biggest challenge Oman has is unemployment, and tourism is the solution. With the right attitude, the youths of Oman could engage in tourism related activities and which does not need the high technical skills. With their right attitude every youth in Oman could be self employed in tourism. John Fareed initiated the first session on the market scenario in the hotel industry in the Middle East region.

He highlighted the hotel performances and the investments in the pipeline. Hotel industry has successfully recovered in some countries, uncovering deficiencies that may slow recovery in the years ahead. By 2029, region will see more than 100,000 new hotel rooms, he added.

Sohar International supports ‘Invest Oman’ initiative as main partner



MUSCAT: Committed to the socio-economic progress of the nation, Sohar International has extended its support as the main partner for the ‘Invest Oman’ lounge that has been initiated and developed by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

The hall was inaugurated on February 27, 2023 at the Civil Aviation Authority under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance in the presence of dignitaries and a large number of local and foreign investors as well as a number of the bank’s senior representatives.

In recognition of its partnership and its unwavering dedication to promoting investments in Oman, Sohar International was honoured with an award during the inauguration ceremony which was received by Sohar International’s Chief Retail Banking Officer — Khalil bin Salim al Hedaifi.

Commenting on the bank’s

extended support to the initiative, Ahmed al Musallami, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International said, “Invest in Oman and Sohar International share a common strategy that is geared at taking concerted efforts to further reaffirm Oman’s position as a hub for investments.

Closely aligned with Oman Vision 2040 and the nation’s revenue diversification agenda, the bank has contributed towards several initiatives that seek to drive foreign direct investments into the country.

With Oman’s progressive economy, the country is set on a positive trajectory and has recorded sustained growth across diverse industries. This has opened new prospects for investments of various scales in the country which can not only make the most of the country’s strategic location, robust infrastructure, and abundant resources but also harness the power of its local talents and its dynamic banking system.”

Jindal Shadeed CEO talks about green steel in latest session of Tejarah Talks

MUSCAT: As a key player in one of the priority sectors identified by the Oman Vision 2040, Jindal Shadeed has been at the forefront of advocating sustainable development in the local manufacturing industry.

In line with the same, the company’s Chief Executive Officer, Harsha Shetty, under whose guidance Jindal Shadeed has been consistently achieving new milestones, recently participated as a panellist in the popular Tejarah Talks session.

The event was held recently at the Zain Auditorium in the Omantel Head Office with the central theme ‘Sustainable Manufacturing: Smart Manufacturing’. The discussions were moderated by HH Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, Managing Partner at The Firm.

Organised by Oman Business Forum in association with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Tejarah Talks is a platform that promotes positive interaction and facilitates the exchange of ideas through a series of informal, interactive evening discussions with prominent thought leaders from across the market.

Commenting on Jindal Shadeed’s participation at the event, Shetty said, “Embracing sustainability is no longer a choice, it’s a prerequisite for business viability. Whether customers, investors, or stakeholders, the effects of climate change have



made society double down on the importance of sustainable operations. Consumers are leaning more toward businesses that uphold strong ESG values.

As a progressive, innovative, and community-centric organisation, Jindal Shadeed places keen emphasis on sustainability and ensures it is well-integrated into all its operations.”

He added saying, “Through the informative Tejarah Talks session, we were able to highlight the role of innovation in powering productivity across the manufacturing value chain while staying committed to furthering the sustainability agenda.

Leading by example, Jindal Shadeed, on the backs of strong data analysis and intelligent edge solutions, has devised breakthrough processes that have led to reduced carbon emissions

and minimal negative impact on the environment.

It is important for manufacturers to acknowledge that reimagining core processes and driving transformation across business ecosystems with an eye on sustainability also has the potential to significantly enhance energy efficiency, decrease costs, and reduce wastage of resources while simultaneously boosting brand credibility, image, and perception.

As the country’s youth grows to be more mindful of such aspects, it becomes even more quintessential to adhere to international best practices and position businesses as environmentally conscious entities.”

With the manufacturing sector in Oman driving socio-economic growth, generating quality employment opportunities,

and bolstering exports, Jindal Shadeed has ensured that it also remains steadfast in taking concerted efforts to embrace technological advancements to inspire innovation across the industry and complement the government’s efforts to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

In addition, the company reserves a keen focus on further strengthening the local economy. Forecasts show that if only 20% of Jindal Shadeed’s steel production in Duqm were to be used in Oman, it could add over \$1 billion to in-country value.

Jindal Shadeed’s participation in Tejarah Talks reaffirms its commitment to spearheading development in the manufacturing industry, promoting sustainable practices, and contributing to building a more resilient, and informed nation.

Invest Oman Lounge: A major step for investment



ABDULAZIZ BIN SALEH AL FAHDI

The business environment in Oman is about to get a significant boost with the opening of Invest Oman Lounge.

The lounge is designed to promote investment opportunities in the country and will provide an exceptional experience for potential investors to explore and understand various investment options available in the Sultanate of Oman.

The opening of this new facility is part of the government's efforts to attract foreign investment and boost the economy. Invest Oman Lounge is a state-of-the-art facility that is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of investment opportunities in Oman.

It offers a one-stop-shop for investors, where they can get all the information they need to make informed investment decisions.

The lounge features interactive displays, multimedia presentations, and other tools that provide various ways to learn about investment opportunities in Oman.

One of the key benefits of Invest Oman Lounge is that it is staffed by experts who can provide guidance and advice to investors on range of issues, from the legal and regulatory framework to the practical aspects of setting up a business in Oman.

This will make it easier for potential investors to get the information they need to make informed investment decisions, take steps with confidence and help them navigate the investment process.

Sultanate of Oman is a country that has several features that makes it an attractive destination for investors. First and foremost, Oman has a strategic location, situated at the crossroads of Asia, Europe, and Africa. This makes it an ideal location for businesses

looking to tap into multiple markets.

The country also has a stable political environment and a favourable business climate, which encourages foreign investment.

The Omani government has taken several measures to attract foreign investors, such as offering tax incentives, streamlined regulations, and simplified procedures for setting up businesses. Notably, the government has decided recently to reduce fees of commercial registration (CR) for the foreign investors and treating them equally with Omani investors based on rules and regulations that will be set by the concerned authorities.

Such decision will open great horizons for foreign investors and will encourage them to establish various projects that supplement the national economy and enhance the economic growth of the Sultanate of Oman.

Moreover, Oman has a diversified economy with a range of sectors that are ripe for investment. The country has significant reserves of oil and gas, which have been the backbone of its economy for decades. However, the government is also keen to diversify the economy and has been investing heavily in sectors such as tourism, logistics, green energy and manufacturing.

This diversification has created new opportunities for investors to tap into emerging markets and industries. Oman's focus on innovation and technology has also attracted several investors who will leverage the country's skilled workforce.

Therefore, these features need an organisation that act as 'one-stop shop' to promote for Sultanate of Oman and its features, and this is where Invest Oman Lounge plays a pivotal role.

Invest Oman Lounge

streamlines the investment procedures and promoting investment opportunities.

Its main function is to provide a hub for investors to access all the necessary information they need. By doing so, the lounge simplifies the investment process, making it easier for investors to do business in Oman.

This, in turn, will attract more investment to the country. Overall, Invest Oman Lounge is instrumental in facilitating investment in Oman, enhancing the country's economic growth, and promoting a favourable investment climate. Invest Oman Lounge is also an important step that is emerged from Oman Vision 2040 for the growth of the Omani economy.

This is a key priority for the Omani government led by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, who is heading the team of the Vision since the era of his ancestor.

Accountants have important role in unearthing money laundering



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCI.

Despite the measures taken by governments and concerned institutions in combating money laundering operations, they are not always successful due to manipulations by individuals and institutions responsible for enforcing compliance.

It is known that money laundering operations aim to legitimise the illegal financial returns that institutions, companies and individuals achieve annually as a result of various financial crimes.

These institutions and individuals work to siphon away revenues and funds, which are sometimes kept in the form of deposits in some banks and financial institutions. Later, these are laundered through economic, commercial, real estate transactions by concealing their illegal sources.

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) follows up on money laundering issues by engaging with global central banks to fight the concealment of ill-gotten wealth. This wealth is used to procure arms illegally, fund terrorism, traffic in human beings, drug sales, prostitution, kidnappings, financial embezzlement,

corruption, thefts, and other illegal acts.

With the aim of strengthening work in combating money laundering methods and protecting institutions at the level of Arab countries, some local institutions, including the International Arab Society of Certified Accountants and Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Global, have issued useful manuals and guides.

They advise accountants in particular to comply with laws and legislation in combating money laundering and terrorist financing, and to report any suspicious transactions.

The value of money laundering operations is increasing annually despite the measures.

At the same time, there are no accurate statistics on the amounts circulating in local economies resulting from laundering operations worldwide.

For 2021, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has estimated that such funds range from 2 to 5% of the global GDP, which is about \$800 billion.

Accountants must play an important role in flagging suspect transactions and reporting to the concerned authorities. They have a duty to identify launderers and audit illegal funds. Not doing so deliberately or otherwise amounts to complicity in money laundering.

The guides in question provide advice on steps that accountants must take in exposing illegal transactions. Money laundering operations will continue if accountants fail in their required work and conceal information that must be communicated to the concerned authorities.

Why the dollar keeps winning in the global economy



FRANCESCO GUERRERA

The author is global economics editor for Breakingviews, based in London.

Reports of the dollar's demise are greatly exaggerated. An erosion in the greenback's share of global foreign exchange reserves, combined with rising geopolitical tensions, have rekindled talk of an end to the US currency's dominance.

In fact, its lynchpin status remains unshaken.

The outsized role played by the United States in capital markets, trade and debt reinforces the status quo. Unless the global economy undergoes a complete overhaul, the dollar will remain on top.

America may have never "run on Dunkin'", as the donut-maker's slogan claimed, but the global economy runs on the dollar.

That makes many foreigners uneasy. Over-reliance on the American currency can lead to instability in emerging markets, dampen trade flows and create global spillovers, such as when financial markets melted down in March 2020.

This has been the case ever since the dollar's coronation as the leading reserve currency after World War Two. In 1971 US Treasury Secretary John Connally famously quipped that "the dollar is our currency but it is your problem".

In 2019, almost 50 years later, Bank of England Governor Mark Carney endorsed the same sentiment. Current pretenders to the throne include the Chinese yuan and digital currencies.

The People's Republic has long tried to promote international use

of its currency. Its latest gambit is to offer to oil exporters payment in yuan to widen the reach of the Chinese currency.

Meanwhile some central banks are touting digital currencies as a way to create a more balanced global economy where no single country dominates.

The United States has spurred the search for alternatives by wielding its currency as a weapon against its adversaries.

After Russia invaded Ukraine, America and its allies froze nearly half of the country's \$640 billion in foreign exchange reserves. The US has also targeted dollars held by Afghanistan, Iran and Venezuela, while banks that circumvent American sanctions face hefty fines. Proponents of regime change point to the steady fall in the dollar's share of central banks' foreign exchange reserves.

That stood at around 59% in 2022, down from over 70% in 1999, according to the International Monetary Fund.

Meanwhile, the US share of the world economic output has fallen from 32% in 1980 to 24% in 2020, according to calculations by the US Federal Reserve, while the country's share of global trade dropped from 14% to 11% in the same period.

Yet in other respects the dollar's grip is as tight as ever. The dollar was on one side of 88% of all foreign exchange trades in April last year, according to the Bank for International Settlements.

The Fed estimates that between 1999 and 2019 the dollar accounted for 96% of trade invoicing in the Americas, 74% in the Asia-Pacific region, and 79% in the rest of the world.

Banks used the greenback for around 60% of all international deposits and loans. Structural factors also help. US capital markets are deep and liquid enough to absorb the savings of emerging and developed countries.

The proceeds of an international "savings glut" are therefore recycled into US assets. The greenback's function as the lubricant of global economic activity has another important effect: a stronger dollar curbs global trade.

Research by American University's Valentina Bruno and Hyun Song Shin of the BIS shows that when the US currency appreciates, trading for companies in other countries becomes more expensive.

This more than offsets the traditional export-boosting effect of a weaker domestic currency.

This contributes to what Fed researchers have dubbed an "Imperial Circle". When the dollar strengthens, it puts the brakes on trade and global growth. Since US economic growth is less dependent on the rest of the world, this increases the attractiveness of dollar-denominated assets for foreign investors.

That, in turn, bolsters the dollar's dominance of the world's economy, further pushing up the currency's value.

The trigger for this cycle is often an interest rate increase by the US central bank, the Fed researchers found. What puts an end to it is the fact that, eventually, global weakness in the manufacturing sector spills over into US production.

Rate rises also lead to tighter financial conditions for companies and households, slowing down the US economy. The central role of the dollar in capital markets, however, discourages investors from fleeing the United States, ensuring that the cycle soon starts again.

The period between December 2015, when the Fed raised rates, and December 2018, when the official cost of borrowing peaked at 2.25%-2.50%, illustrates the point.

— Reuters



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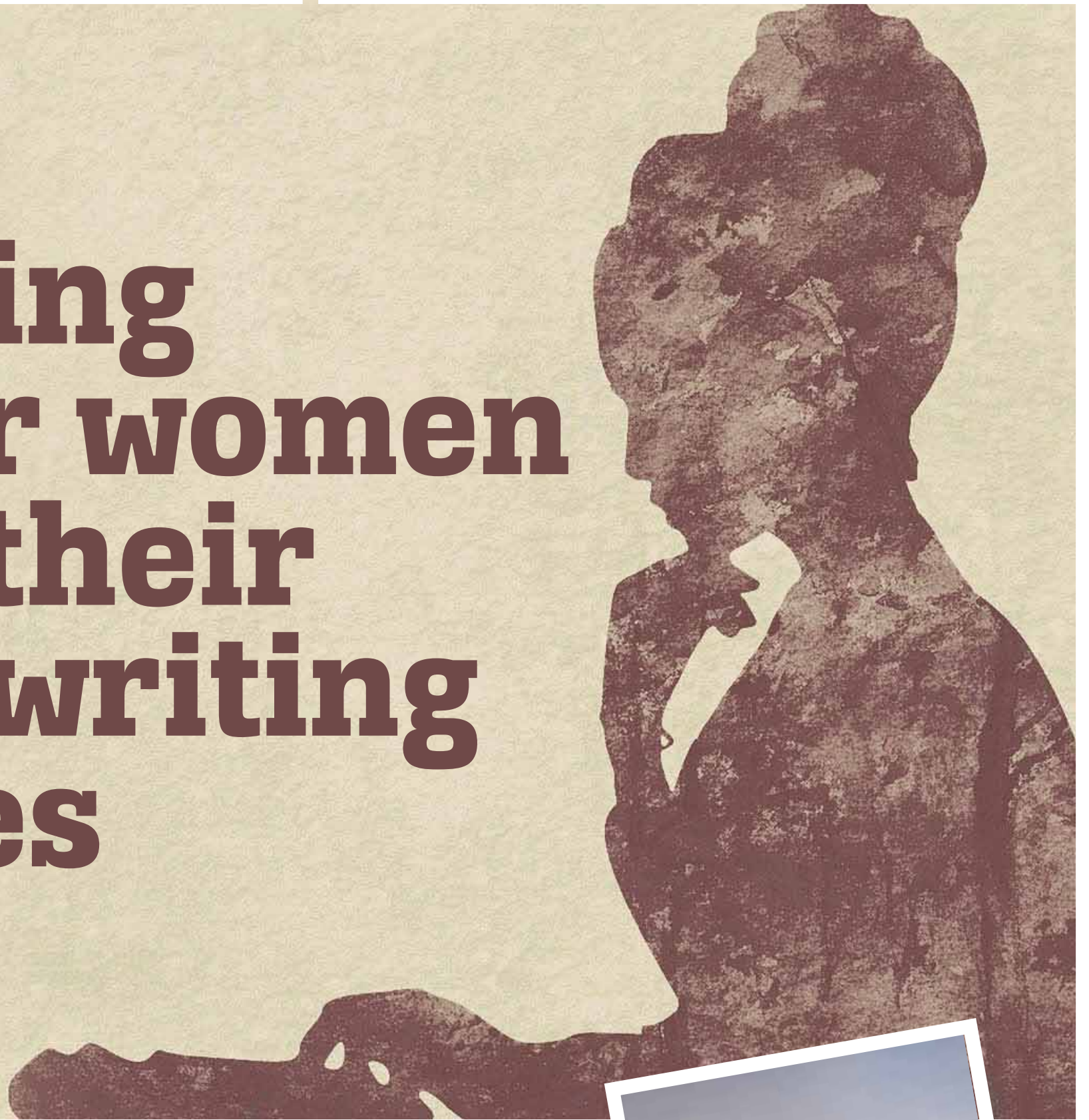
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Helping other women find their own writing voices



By Khulood al Eisaii

Creativity, when nurtured, is like a sapling that bears flowers and fruits. Expressing this creativity is allowing it to breathe and thrive but remove the expression and creativity dies. When someone knocks at the soul's door to bring out the beauty that lies within in the form of poetry, a story, or to pen down the flow of thoughts, what more would one want?

Aisha bint Abdullah al Seraihiyah is one such guiding force who has emerged as a North Star, bringing out the hidden talents of women in Dhofar and giving them a canvas on which to paint their thoughts in the form of stories and articles. As a result, Omani women writers have emerged significantly in the Governorate of Dhofar.

Al Seraihiyah is a driving force that encourages women writers to develop their skills. She believes that women should forget their makeup and focus on revealing the hidden beauty of their experiences and thoughts. She founded the "Noon al Niswa" (Women Cultural Council), a non-profit organisation that is first of its kind in Dhofar.

She has been the Director of Coordination and Programmes at the Omani Bahja Association for Orphans since its inception. In 2020 and 2021, she worked as Secretary of the Omani Society for Writers in Dhofar.

"We are currently holding comprehensive workshops for women in the Dhofar governorate every Saturday, with more than 30 women participating, to empower them and enhance their self-confidence and talent," said Aisha.

"Due to this intensive training, we were able to publish the first part of 'Yastroom.' As we continue these trainings, we can now publish the second part with a new group of women writers", she added.



Aisha Abdul Lah al Seraihiyah

Al Seraihiyah is a driving force that encourages women writers to develop their skills. She believes that women should forget their makeup and focus on revealing the hidden beauty of their experiences and thoughts. She founded the "Noon al Niswa" (Women Cultural Council), a non-profit organisation that is first of its kind in Dhofar.

Aisha began reading at a young age after being inspired by her father, who was also an avid reader. Since such a young age, she has been a reader ever since. She read about politics, economics, cultural studies, and poetry, and from their her reading interests grew.

She regularly contributes to *Al Roya* magazine, *Oman Daily* newspaper, and *Gulf Views* magazine. Her writings range from short stories to literary essays. She has published several books, including two individual books, the first titled 'Stones of the Seventh Dawn' and the second 'Transient Betrayal'.

She has also contributed to three books with a group of writers from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman from Arab countries. Her first book, 'A First Alphabet', the second book 'A First Alphabet Part Two' and the third, 'When the words are papered', is a collection of children's stories.

Aisha conducts workshops on developing writing skills related to cultural or literary aspects in cooperation with the General Directorate of Education. This initiative started in 2020, after the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic as a women's cultural platform, including a group of female writers.

According to Aisha, among the cultural initiatives in the Sultanate of Oman, the 'Noon al Niswa' Cultural Council was officially announced in the Governorate of Dhofar, on November 15, 2022, under the auspices of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture. Noon al Niswa does not merely symbolise women or femininity. It is a project that helps give voice to the unspoken and unwritten yet somewhere thriving thoughts.

Aisha and her group members are working relentlessly to make the Council a positive addition to supporting the cul-



tural movement in the Sultanate of Oman. In addition, this non-profit organisation helps in spreading social awareness through literature.

Saeeda al Baramiyah, Tali'a al Shahriyah, and Hana bait Salim are three important names of writers who supported Aisha's vision of working further on this initiative. Being the first one of its kind, the female writers of Dhofar appreciate this initiative wholeheartedly.

Noon al Niswa aims to train talented women with something to say by following up and supervising them until they begin their literary journey through free voluntary training workshops.

Aisha's message to the women is to read thoroughly and believe in themselves while voicing their opinions through creative writing. Noon al Niswa provides skills and encourages every budding woman writer.

READ

THE FIRST TO DIE AT THE END

BY ADAM SILVERA

In this prequel to "They Both Die at the End," Orion and Valentino attend the premiere of Death-Cast in Times Square.



TRADITION

A man jumps over a bonfire in order to get rid of bad luck in Jieyang, in China's southern Guangdong province.

— AFP



LIFESTYLE

A veiled woman farmer harvests a wheat crop on the outskirts of Ajmer — located at the centre of Rajasthan. It is also known as heart of Rajasthan.

— AFP





Swapping kabsa for kale: Saudis embrace healthy eating

LONG PARTIAL TO heavy lunchtime platters of meat and rice, Asim al Shammari has recently turned to lighter fare from a self-described diet restaurant, swayed by Saudi Arabia's anti-obesity push.

Roughly one in five Saudi adults is obese, according to an in-depth study published by the World Bank last year that described the problem as "alarming".

The Global Obesity Observatory places the kingdom at number 17 in its international rankings of obesity prevalence, three slots below the United States and near neighbours Qatar and Kuwait.

But the Vision 2030 reform agenda spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman includes goals for bringing down both obesity and diabetes by decade's end.

The effort is being helped by a raft of new restaurants offering healthier alternatives to some traditional Saudi fare, including the spot where Al Shammari, a financial analyst, tucked into a plate of chicken, rice and carrots one recent afternoon.

"I used to eat burgers, shawarma or kabsa while I was at work," said the 28-year-old, referring to a rice dish usually served on large shared plates.

"This increased obesity, especially with eight-hour office work and lack of movement."

LIFESTYLE CHANGE

For decades, Saudis spent much of their free time in restaurants and shopping malls, and food was a chief source of entertainment in the closed-off kingdom, where high temperatures limit outdoor activities for much of the year.

In 2019, the health ministry started requiring restaurants to include calorie information on menus to encourage healthy eating.

Fast food options — from international favourites like McDonald's to local chains like AlBaik — remain ubiquitous in the kingdom's main cities, but they are starting to face more varied competition.

Saad al Hader, a 25-year-old doctor, said he used to bring

meals from home in order to eat something besides junk food, but the proliferation of new health-conscious eateries has made his life easier.

"The popularity of these restaurants, and the fact that they are close to workplaces, makes it

One such plan provides a meal a day for a month for 450 Saudi riyals (\$120).

Basil Chehayeb, a Lebanese national who runs a restaurant called Reshape in the Saudi capital Riyadh, said he had opened two new branches in the past 18 months to

foods," he said.

TARGETING THE YOUTH

Efforts by restaurants and other private sector businesses to promote healthy eating have been supplemented by other health-minded interventions.

The Saudi Sports for All Federation now organises regular events like the Riyadh Marathon, which this year drew thousands of runners to the streets of Riyadh.

Officials have also begun work on a 135-kilometre (85-mile) Sports Boulevard in the capital featuring foot, cycle and horse-riding paths.

Beginning with the current academic year, the Saudi health ministry has banned the sale of soft



easier to stick to healthy eating," he said as he dined on salmon and grilled potatoes.

Growing number of restaurants are offering meal plans that send salads and other healthy meals to clients' homes and workplaces.

keep up with demand.

The restaurant provides meals each day to about 500 subscribers, most of whom are Saudis.

"Saudis have changed their lifestyle and are now attending sports clubs and eating healthy

drinks in schools.

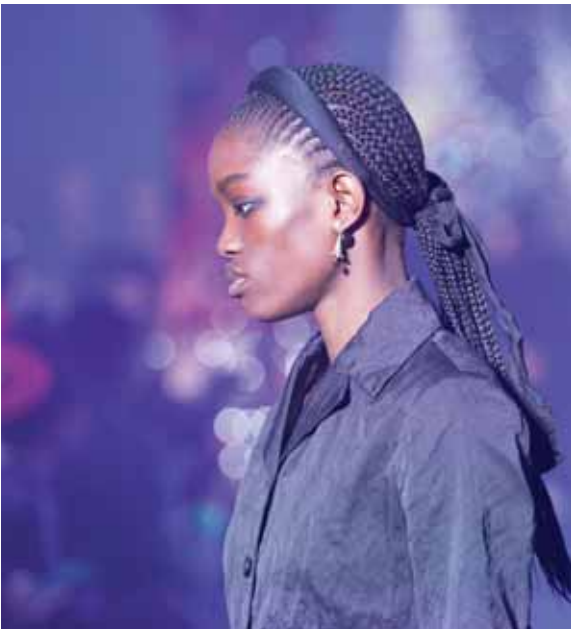
The message seems to be getting through, at least among young people, said public health consultant Lamia al Brahim.

"Obesity is a serious health problem" but "it is very noticeable now that health awareness is increasing among the young generation," she said.

"Societal behaviour changes need a long time, and these efforts start from within the home, then the school and then the government agencies." — **AFP**

FASHION

Power scarves and punk elegance for Dior and Saint Laurent's strong women



DIOR AND SAINT LAURENT both combined nostalgia with homages to strong, independent women as the two French fashion giants presented their latest collections in Paris on Tuesday.

Under a giant surreal flower made of fluorescent textiles, Dior offered a softer reworking of its classic New Look from the 1950s.

A few hours later, Saint Laurent drew on very different traditions, with golden chandeliers, tinkling piano music — and the giant shoulder pads and aviator shades of a 1980s fever dream.

Dior designer Maria Grazia Chiuri said she was particularly inspired by three early clients of Dior: his sister Catherine, who was a Resistance fighter and businesswoman who refused to marry; the muse of the existentialists Juliette Greco and the "tough-as-leather" singing icon Edith Piaf.

"In addition to being very elegant, they had a bit of a punk attitude," she said ahead of the show.

To the sounds of Piaf's "Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien", the new collection softened the rigid lines of the New Look's fitted jackets with mid-length skirts and dresses, floral motifs and more flexible fabrics.

"It creates something which adapts to every body and allows a reinterpretation of the 1950s into something much softer and more personal," said Chiuri.

POWER SCARVES

At Saint Laurent, the vibe was much more about classic evening wear, but the professionals in the audience were impressed by designer Anthony Vaccarello's ability to add a modern twist.



"Anthony Vaccarello did it again," said Simon Longland, director of buying for London's Harrods department store. "A strong and powerfully feminine collection — no one is messing with this Saint Laurent woman!"

On display were billowing tops in silk and chiffon, slit pencil skirts — and many examples of the extreme 80s power-shouldered blazers, which Longland said were "guaranteed to be on the must-have list for the season".

"We may also have seen the invention of the 'Power Scarf'," he added.

Despite the very different vibe, that chimed well with Chiuri's vision of a "strong and independent" Dior women, breaking with her image as "romantic and fragile". One big difference is the heels.

Saint Laurent's models were all teetering atop razor-sharp talons.

Chiuri has largely refused to include them on feminist grounds, though they have started to sneak into recent collections — this time in a twisted question-mark shape.

"Personally, I hardly ever wear them," she said. "But for some occasions, I like to wear heels, though not too excessive."

Among the celebrity guests were actors including Charlize Theron and star-of-the-moment Bella Ramsey, from hit show "The Last of Us".

The giant flower overhead, which looked somewhat like a trippy octopus, was the work of Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos, who said she was inspired by Catherine Dior — "a woman who was strong and sensitive". — **AFP**



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AROUND THE WORLD

TRAVEL TALES

Egypt taps private firms and long-delayed museum to revitalise tourism



EGYPT, HOME to ancient pyramids and Red Sea resorts, aims to boost tourism by up to 30 per cent annually over the next five years, bringing in private firms to operate sites and inaugurating a huge museum around the end of 2023, its tourism minister said.

Tourism is a crucial source of foreign currency and jobs for Egypt's struggling economy. The sector earned \$10.75 billion in the financial year ending in June 2022, up from \$4.86 billion the prior year, when it was hurt by the coronavirus pandemic. But it captures a little under 1 per cent of the global tourism market, said Ahmed Issa, a former banker appointed as tourism minister last summer.

The budget for more than 2,000 archaeological sites and 41 museums in the 2021/22 financial year was a modest 3.2 billion Egyptian pounds (\$170 million at the exchange rate at the time).

"I think Egypt deserves and should be able to grow its tourism industry by 25 per cent to 30 per cent per annum consistently over the coming decade. And that should get us to about 30 million (visitors) by the year 2028," Issa said in an interview. "It's a product that has the most compelling competitive advantage of all the products that Egypt can offer globally."

Immediate priorities include expanding flight capacity and improving the investment climate by streamlining regulation, Issa said.

A need to increase the number of hotel rooms to half a million by 2030 from 212,000 last year could draw \$30 billion in private investment, and private companies were involved in pilot projects to manage 10 sites, he added.

These include the Giza pyramids, the Egyptian Museum in central Cairo, and the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) that will soon house the country's most prestigious artefacts.

"We are reviewing this experiment today, to be able to learn from it and be able to take it to the next level and expand on it," Issa said.

The repeatedly delayed opening of GEM, a vast structure near the Giza pyramids that has been under construction since 2005, was likely to happen between October and January, Issa said. Egypt hopes to attract world leaders to attend the inauguration.

A rebound in visitor numbers from European and other markets was compensating for losses from what used to be Egypt's top two markets, Russia and Ukraine, Issa said, adding he expected a surge in Chinese tourists this year.

Longer term, Egypt would seek to develop the market for independent travellers alongside tour operator packages, he added. — **Reuters**

LIFESTYLE

Customised kicks: North Macedonia sneaker artist sketches new path



FROM A MAKESHIFT studio in a cramped apartment in North Macedonia's Skopje, Satja Grabuloski has made his mark as one of the top sneaker artists in the world.

With more than 300 celebrities as customers, Grabuloski has taken orders from famous athletes, actors, and musicians — including LeBron James and Dua Lipa.

Using an array of paints, Grabuloski and his team of seven artists turn ordinary shoes into works of art — featuring portraits of famous celebrities, film characters and sports stars along with splashes of vibrant colours.

"Sometimes they call us with a specific idea. Sometimes they say, I have no idea — make me a good design. We then do whatever it takes to make the client satisfied," Grabuloski, 31, said as he prepares a shipment of customised football cleats for Real Madrid's winger Vinicius Junior.

A single pair of revamped sneakers painted by his team at Swithadot StudioS fetches a starting price at around 1,000 euros (\$1,050).

The growing enterprise first started as a hobby for Grabuloski, who remembers using a paint kit his mother bought from Paris to ink patterns on a pair of shoes when he was 12.

More than a decade later, Grabuloski was putting custom designs on sneakers with a permanent marker. The method proved to be a hit with his first batch of shoes selling out in 24 hours.

"That showed me... there is a potential business idea that I

am still building and developing today," he adds.

- 'KNOCKED ON 1,000 DOORS' -

Armed with a marketing degree and a smartphone, Grabuloski relied on word of mouth and networking with social media influencers to help build his brand.

Grabuloski also honed in on

targeting athletes and found initial success with painting shoes for handball clubs and popular footballers.

"I have knocked on 1,000 doors — some of them opened," Grabuloski explains.

"I used the players who bought shoes from us — one-by-one — as a starting point to make contacts with their friends, co-players in the club or in the national team."

All the designs made by his team at Swithadot StudioS are unique, according to Grabuloski, with clients given certifications of authenticity and a short note on the ideas behind the artwork.

"Every project includes up to

80 hours of work, but some of the designs, for example sport shoes that were done for LeBron James were being prepared for more than 300 hours," says Grabuloski, while laughing that the massive size of the star player's shoes led to more work.

For now, Grabuloski plans to stay and work in North Macedonia, despite longer shipping times due to the limited number of flights in and out of the Balkan country.

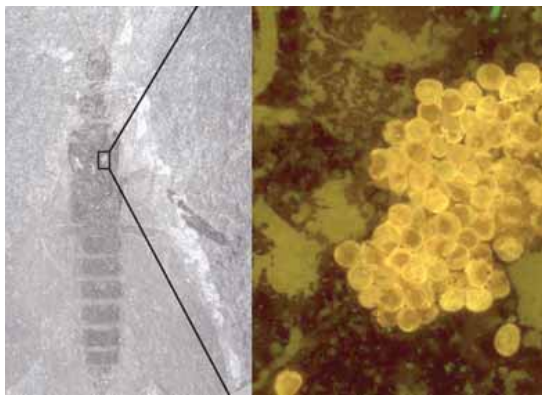
But even as he plans to stay in Skopje, Grabuloski is in the process of opening up a showroom in New York, with plans to expand to other major cities soon.

With his business booming, Grabuloski admits he is often stretched between running the daily operations, networking, and researching new markets, which leaves little time to dabble in his favourite hobby.

"I do not have time to draw anymore," Grabuloski said. "I miss it very much." — **AFP**

DISCOVERY

Scientists find pollen-covered insects from 280 million years ago



SCIENTISTS BELIEVE they have uncovered the earliest insects to be covered in pollen, dating back to around 280 million years ago.

Palaeontologists in Russia discovered fossil remains of ancient earwig-like insects, known as tillyard embiids, in a lagoon near the village of Chekarda, about 1,600km from Moscow.

These tillyard embiids, which hail from the Paleozoic era from around 542 to 250 million years ago, were found covered in pollen from seed-producing, non-flowering plants known as gymnosperms.

This was long before flowering plants became more common, sometime between 100 to 50 million years ago.

The scientists said their findings, published in the journal Biology Letters, predate the earliest known pollen-covered insects by 120 million years.

They also believe the behaviour of these tillyard embiids could be seen as a precursor to insect pollination.

Dr Alexander Khramov, a senior researcher at the Paleontological Institute, Russian Academy of Science in Moscow, said: "Our discovery sheds light on the early evolution of insect pollination.

"It provides direct, smoking-gun evidence of pollen dispersion by Paleozoic insects."

Dr Khramov and his colleagues found a handful of extinct tillyard embiids with pollen preserved on their heads, thoraxes, legs and abdomens.

He said fossils such as these are rare to find.

Dr Khramov said: "To uncover them (the tillyard embiids), palaeontologists like me split the rock with a hammer.

"The insect-bearing rocks of Chekarda were deposited at the bottom of an ancient lagoon about 280 million years ago, in the early Permian period (the last period of the Paleozoic era).

"This was a time when ambers with insect inclusions did not exist.

"It was really unexpected to discover that pollen could be preserved on body surfaces of Paleozoic insects flattened in the rock."

The researchers said that judging by the pollen composition, the tillyard embiids only ever visited a narrow range of host plants.

While recent fossil discoveries suggest insect pollinators and gymnosperms may have co-evolved — long before the appearance of flowering plants — the experts said it is impossible to say for certain whether tillyard embiids were pollen consumers or contributed to pollination.

Dr Khramov said: "Tillyard embiids had wings, so they could disperse pollen more effectively.

"We cannot go back in a time machine to observe whether these insects did pollination work or not.

"Even if they pollinated ancient gymnosperms all day round, there are no ways to prove it with certainty by means of palaeontology.

"Who knows, maybe they simply gobbled up pollen, and plants did not benefit from it?

"Anyway, what we could say for sure is that tillyard embiids visited quite a narrow range of plants and carried their pollen in large amounts.

"So I do not see why they could not have been pollinators." — **PA Media/dpa**



A second life for books



By Zuwaina al Sulaimani

The Business Society of the College of Economics and Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University has organised the 11th edition of the Charity Book Fair under the theme "Enrich and Give". The fair aimed to collect used books from the community in various fields, sort and reprice them at affordable prices for all, and then sell them in a three-day exhibition held from 8th to 10th December 2022 at Oman Mall in Muscat.

The event was launched by His Highness Dr Fares bin Turki al Said,

and it included three corners: a book corner, a photography corner, and an interactive corner for children. The fair was a great success, with 899 purchases and 3807 books sold, resulting in a total revenue of 5587 Omani rials.

This year, a competition among various universities and colleges in the Sultanate of Oman has been held to encourage students to participate and share their love of volunteering. The funds raised from the fair were donated to Oman Bahjah Orphan Society to build the largest residential complex for orphans in the Sultanate of Oman.

This fair has exciting opportunities for the community to donate and purchase used books, providing a sustainable way

to keep knowledge alive and accessible for everyone. It also provides a platform for students to participate in charitable causes, develop their entrepreneurial skills, and gain experience in event management.

The success of the 11th edition of the Used Book Fair reflects the strong support and cooperation of the community and the private sector in promoting education and literacy in the Sultanate of Oman. The Business Society has set an inspiring example of how students can make a positive impact on society and contribute to the common good. When I was a student, at Sultan Qaboos University, I had personally participated in the previous

edition of the Charity Book Fair in 2022, and I was impressed by the hard work and dedication of the team behind the fair. It was inspiring to witness the collective effort of students, volunteers, and sponsors, who worked tirelessly to make the event a success.

The atmosphere was vibrant, and the selection of books was impressive. I found it to be a unique experience that not only allowed me to buy books at affordable prices but also enabled me to contribute to a charitable cause. The success of this year's edition is a testament to the ongoing commitment of the Business Society at Sultan Qaboos University in supporting education and community service.

